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C O N F I D E N T I A L TBILISI 002030

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DEPT FOR EUR DAS MATT BRYZA, EUR/CARC, AND DRL

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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SPEAKER MACHAVARIANI DISCUSSES ELECTIONS,  
MORE

REF: TBILISI 1638

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Mark X. Perry for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

**¶1.** (C) Summary: During a July 24 meeting with Poloff, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Mikheil Machavariani, discussed the upcoming 2008 elections. He said that he will be the campaign chairman for the ruling National Movement (UNM) party and lead its nationwide campaign. He advised that the majority will agree to lower the threshold for participation in Parliament from 7 percent this Fall (reftel) but did not specify what the new level will be. On the two other issues raised by the opposition, he said it is unlikely that the UNM will agree to include opposition representatives on the Central Election Commission (CEC). Machavariani believes any change to the majoritarian winner-take-all system will not affect the election's outcome. In a personal switch, Machavariani will not run in his district next year, but rather as a majoritarian candidate on the UNM party list. He also said that he recently met with a Russian delegation. The Russians were surprised by the state of affairs they found in Georgia and did not appear well informed as to actual, recent progress. On a final note, Machavariani mentioned a recent discussion he had with Turkmenistan officials regarding natural gas supplies. He said they appeared quite willing to engage with and sell gas to anyone "Georgia, Europe, whoever" once the details of a transportation network are determined. End Summary.

**¶2.** (C) On July 24, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Mikheil Machavariani, met Poloffs on a range of issues. He said:

- He will be the campaign chairman for the ruling National Movement (UNM) party and lead the nationwide campaign in the 2008 Parliamentary elections.

- The majority will cede this Fall on the issue of the current 7 percent threshold (reftel) required for party list representation on the ballot. He said he did not know what the threshold will be, "but it won't be 7 percent." (Note: The opposition has demanded it be returned to its original level of 5 percent.)

- The UNM will not likely budge on the composition of the CEC (reftel), which the UNM believes is non-partisan and professional.

- It is "very unlikely" that the opposition's concerns regarding the majoritarian winner-take-all system (reftel) would be addressed. He mentioned there may be some slight flexibility in addressing the current system, but it will not make a difference in the outcome.

- He will not run in his district next year (which he has held for two terms), but rather as a majoritarian candidate

on the UNM party list. Interestingly, we have heard that Speaker Burjanadze will also run as a party list candidate rather than as a representative from her district in Kutaisi.

- He recently met with a Russian delegation who appeared genuinely surprised as to the true state of affairs in Georgia and did not appear well informed as to actual, recent progress.

- That Turkmenistan officials are quite eager to entertain dialogue on future sales of their natural gas with any and all prospective buyers. "They said we will sell gas to anyone once the transport network is figured out," reported Machavariani.

¶3. (C) Comment: Machavariani is one of the kingmakers in Parliament and despite recent treatment in Europe for a medical condition, appears to be preparing to continue this role in the run-up to the 2008 Parliamentary elections. Our reports indicate that the ruling party is planning to give on the threshold issue - something also supported by the COE - but not move significantly on the issue of the winner-take-all system and not move at all on the composition of the CEC. End comment.

PERRY